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The Sunny South

**ITS FERTILITY OF RESOURCES
AND ITS PROMISE OF DEVELOPMENT—FEW FACTS ABOUT
THE "ALABAMA COON"**

By C. C. Packard, In The Toledo Courier-Journal.

Selma, Ala., July 5, 1905.—I am to-day in receipt of a letter from a northern friend asking "why do you stay in that hot country this hot weather; why not come north, where it is cool?" And as I read that letter I saw by the telegraph that Pittsburgh was boiling and had twenty deaths from heat in a single day; that people and animals were dropping dead in New York city; that the mercury was far up at Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and Buffalo. And saw in a copy of a Toledo paper which fell into my hands an editorial squib relating that the writer had "tossed and tumbled and sweated all night" and of the sweltering conditions there. And recalled that, for the five summers I had passed in the south—much of them as far south as this point—I have never slept a night through without need for cover ere morning came, nor known of a single cause of sun-stroke or heat attack throughout this entire region. Why not? I don't know but I know the facts exist. This city is 200 miles distant from the Gulf shores and so participates but lightly in the Gulf breeze. And still here, in the very heart and core of the "Black Belt" this fact remains true.

Indeed, it is a mystery how much we get of politics and artless discussion of intricate matters, and how little we really know of our own land. For instance, fertile land, well located, adjacent to thriving and prosperous cities, located on splendid made highways—equal to the best stone roads which penetrate Laue county—and well watered with pure, soft water, is now to be had at from \$5 to \$20 per acre! This land is cleared and fenced and ready for the plow; is located in Montgomery county, Ala. Montgomery is the capital of the state, a city of 50,000 inhabitants. The county has 130 miles of made roadways, over every mile of which an automobile can be driven with as little disturbance as would occur were it passing out Collingwood.

The Black Belt.

And this land is situated in the heart of the Black Belt.

"But hold on," I hear my reader say "who wants to live in the Black Belt surrounded by niggers?" For, for all our pious charity for the black man and brother, none of us wish to tie close to his reeking personality. But that is quite another feature of the discussion. What I started to write is, that I'd be willing to wager a fine Klondike mine against Grover Cleveland's patriotism, that not one in a hundred will know that the Black Belt of the south does not, primarily, mean that that particular stretch of country is densely inhabited by negroes, but that the soil is rich and black, capable of producing great crops year in and out, for no one knows how long. As a matter of fact the Black Belt of Alabama should be termed the Black Land Belt. No doubt it is chiefly populated by black folk; in some cases far more than 16 to 1; but the land is black. It enters the state at the southeastern border and extends diagonally across, continuing through Mississippi until the great river of that name is reached. It is from three to thirty miles wide, and possesses a soil not surpassed by the bottom lands of Egypt, Illinois or the world-famous delta of the Yazoo Valley, which itself is not surpassed in fertile resources by Egypt of old. And this Black Belt land of Alabama is not an unhealthy spot. It is admirably drained, the foothills of the Cumberland stretch down to its borders, while its entire surface is penetrated by divers rivers, creeks, brooks and streams, springing in most cases, which offer at once good drainage and excellent water.

This land—I wish I owned some of it, but I have no single acre so may say I am credited with a desire to write the simple truth—will produce two crops each season. This cannot be helped. They will come. You do not have to gather the crab grass hay which follows, corn, oats, barely or any cultivated crop. But, if you will it will repay you to the extent of from one and one-half to two tons of hay to the acre, hay which will rival in succulence the best red top clover or timothy grown. And if you wish, you may reap three and even four times between January 1 and December 31, if you will give heed to due sequence of crops.

Wasted Opportunities.

It is impossible for one used to the ways which obtain on the shores of Lake Erie to understand how these numerous opportunities exist and are not taken advantage of by those now living there. To fully explain this would require more space than is offered by your entire issue today. And the knowledge of these facts, and of how little they are understood in the north, is what offers interest. If it were possible for the nearly 5,000,000 people who live in Ohio to know precisely what are the conditions from the Ohio river to Perdido bay, there would be an end to race troubles and mayhap to much of the labor annoyance. For those now discontented; unable to acquire land at high values, could easily procure an existence where they can live out of doors; every one of the 365 days of the year, and where they can raise some article of food in their gardens each of the twelve months.

In fact the ease with which a man living in procured may be said to rest at the bottom of the sloth and ignorance of the south. Doubtless circumstances of the past have had much to do with it. Slavery was one feature. The negro is another part of the problem. But from the happenings at

Evansville, Springfield, in Delaware and in New Jersey, it is not a difficult prophecy to make that the north is coming to have an understanding of what "white supremacy" means, and what the black man is in no sense a fit running partner for the white one. And as the black plague spreads over the north this condition is certain to increase. And burnings and hangings multiply. I am not defending; merely making a guess at the future.

"Worn Out Lands."

But to return to the south. We read of "worn out lands." Do you know what that means. Merely that, year in and out, for a hundred years, perhaps, the same soil has yielded the same crop. And, until within a few recent years, when artificial fertilizers have come into use, without a single ounce of manure. How long, think you, would the best farms in Ohio yield with such treatment? There is no winter in Alabama; none such as we know. Occasional snow may fall. And at times ice forms in thin sheets. But it is gone when the sun looks at it; retreats, shame-faced, as though it knew it was a long way from home. As a result you may ride or drive through the entire state of Alabama, and you will not see a single big barn! Or at least not as many as are to be found in one township of Lucas county. As a normal result, there is no central place where the stock gathers. It runs wild in the winter time. It is neither housed nor fed. The manure is wasted. It could not be otherwise. And the cattle are apologies. In a land of splendid pasture; of unexcelled water; with a climate which does not try animals in the summer beyond that which our cattle endure, and where the winter affords them no trouble, it is only within a few short years—three or four—that the slightest attention has been given to beef-cattle growing. Now it is coming up for discussion. Herford, Short Horns, Galloways, Aberdeen Angus, and Devons are being brought down from the north with which to improve the native stock. Slowly, to be sure, for here is another trouble. The "tick fever" fatally attacks these northern animals. And kills them. I saw a herd of fine Short Horn animals near West Point, Miss., last summer, owned by Col. F. M. Abbott of this city. There were between 500 and 600 of them, and all real beauties. But Col. Abbott, told me that when he laid the foundation of the herd a dozen years since, he lost more than half of all he brought down. But he has persisted, and today has his reward. Last winter a car-load of his cattle fetched the top price for the week at Kansas City, averaging, I believe, something above 1,600 pounds each.

In West Florida.

When I first visited West Florida, less than half a dozen years since, it was stated to me as an absolute fact that the average weight of cattle for that state was between 600 and 700 pounds. In fact, the one joke the new-comer was sure to "meet up" with was the gravely admitted statement that the only profitable cross to make on one of these diminutive Florida cows was to cross her with a locomotive! West Florida, your map will advise you, is geographically a fair part of Alabama, and so pertinent to this article.

One of the most common terms met in the south is "Cow pen." This, in many cases, has come to be the name of a town or cross-roads. It is the result of "penning" cattle at night at some central point; as they were driven to the landings on the streams or Gulf from where they were shipped to consuming points. These spots remain exceedingly fertile, after years of cropping, and today show where cattle were "penned" long before the war. I saw last week, in the midst of a great field of growing cotton a "pen" where the cotton was growing with such vigor as to mark the outlines of the original enclosure.

But, while intensive farming, and rotation of crops will restore any of the so-called "worn out" land and there are other methods, infallible and easy of application, which will accomplish the same result. The several Legumes will accomplish this result on the poorest, most washed-out land, and within a single year. What are legumes? The nitrogenous plants which take in

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EXPERIENCE OF A REFUGEE IN 1888

FLORIDIAN WENT AGAINST THE
REAL ARTICLE WHILE FLEE-
ING FROM YELLOW
FEVER.

"Talk about refugeeing from yellow jack in 1905," said a guest at one of Jacksonville's hotels Sunday, to the Jacksonville Times-Union, you ought to have run up against the game in 1888. It was fierce.

When the yellow jack broke out in one of the inland towns of Florida, I was assisting the agent at one of the railroad lines. Of course there was nothing doing in railroad business at that town then and my services were not required. Something whispered in my ear that I had better "git" and I "got." It was just nine miles and three quarters from a pay day and I had not a bank account in those days. Beating my way on the train was an easy matter. Any good railroad man can do that, but hustling among the boys for money during a stampede of that kind is like looking for diamonds in Florida sand.

I traveled for Atlanta, and in due course of time in Atlanta I arrived. It was rather late in the season then and I wore only a light cotton suit of clothes, something like crash, only it was not of as good quality. I like to freeze to death. But I was game. I banked up to the counter of the bar in the Kimball House, then the swellest thing in that town, paid for a 20-cent drink out of the \$2 bill which constituted my assets. I walked out feeling poor but lordly.

"But my bad luck was yet to come. Walking down one of the principal thoroughfares of the town I saw a sign about as big as a barn. At the top of the best show poster I ever looked upon were the words 'Wilson's Minstrels.' Could not miss that. And so I paid out of the \$1.80 I had left \$1 for a ticket to see the show and sat in the dress circle. Still game, I went to the Kimball house and paid out 75 cents for a bed and had 5 cents for coffee in the morning.

"I couldn't make a turn in Atlanta and decided to take a peep into old Alabama just for luck. I landed in one of the principal towns in that state and got a job. I was at work at the telegraph key the next morning with only roseate prospects ahead, when what should turn up but the entire vigilance committee of the town to demand my immediate evacuation of my job and my retreat out of the city, giving me the privilege, of course, of reserving my arms. But I was put next by a wise one and would not go. They could not force me to leave the city after I was in that place, and I made the point with my head up in the air. Things looked all right then and the mayor patted me on the back. 'You are a game fellow,' he said. 'I like your nerve. There is something to you.' This as we were leaving the office of the mayor, whether he had wandered to discuss my case. Continuing, the mayor said: 'Just make yourself at home, old chap, and don't worry about what anyone says.'

"That Mayor won me in a hurry. I thought that a last I had a friend, and, of course, when he invited me for a drive that afternoon I accepted the invitation. I ought to have caught some of the significant glances as we drove down one of the principle streets behind a beautiful black span. But I was too much interested in what I considered my good luck to heed such that. We drove rather fast, as I had indicated that I was fond of fast driving.

"All of a sudden, that Mayor jerked the team to a full stop. 'Look here,' he said, pointing to a fence; 'that fence marks the city limits. Now get out of this buggy and don't you attempt to return to the city.' I might have made a fight of it had not three or four pretty husky fellows showed up from behind that same fence. I saw it at a glance, and decided to walk on. I had to walk to the next station, where I hired out to cook for a railroad gang at \$20 per month. Right there I staid until I could return to good old Florida. Talk about your refugeeing now. You heard nothing of mosquitoes in those days. It was shot guns and knives without sympathy."

nitrogen from the atmosphere and thus give back that which this plants have taken. Red clover is the best known member of this family in Ohio; in the south the cow pea, velvet bean, beggar weed, Mexican clover and melotulus are among the most widely employed. I have seen a field which was absolutely worthless from long continued cropping with cotton, returned to its pristine vigor in a single season by being sown with cow peas and the crop turned under. The next year a fine crop of corn was made. The velvet bean is a Japanese plant, first brought hither as a vine for adornment. It is a prodigious grower; a great producer of humus. It will absolutely cover and hide the land; will climb stumps and trees, its roots penetrating deep into the lightest sand, while its broad leaves gather in the nitrogen and hold it for rejuvenation of the soil. It is a long season plant, requiring some seven months to come to maturity, while the cow peas flourishes as far north as the Tennessee river valley. With the aid of these legumes all of this land can be made immensely fertile and at so small cost as to appear ridiculous.

An Alabama Experiment.

An experiment in which many northern people are financially interested is being worked at (not out) at Beloit, Ala., a few miles from Selma. The proposition is that benevolent northern people give money; this is invested in land, and in turn sold to the negroes at cost, and on ten-year payments. The cost is based on the rental value of the land, which is about \$2.50 per acre per annum. Thus, by paying a total of \$25 per acre, the payments extending over the period

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named, the black man may own his home. The superintendent confided in me that the great obstacle they meet is the total shiftlessness of the negro. He will not care for tomorrow. He owns none of the home-hunger common to the white-skinned man. While it is claimed by those in control that progress is being made those who live in the vicinity insist that while the plan has been in operation not less than a dozen years it is doubtful if a family a year has gone into possession of a home. The base of the proposition is that, owing to large land holdings, there is developing a system of "absentee landlordism." The planter who owns from 1,000 to 20,000 acres of land, can and does rent it to the negroes at a sum per year which affords him a handsome income. He and his family then remove to the nearest town or city of size, and the farm-plantation is turned over to the tender mercies of the ignorant and lazy blackamoors. Nothing is done, from year to year to increase the fertility of the soil; all effort is directed toward wringing from the land the last possible outcome, and, year by year, the property falls in value. But the owner has so much that a slightly less

income per acre does not matter. The tenants of course, do not care. And the county suffers. So the Beloit proposition is based on a real service. But it seems doubtful if it can be worked out, so long as the negro is dependent on to serve.

An Era in Progress.

The isthmian canal marks an era in southern progress. With the big ditch cut there will be accomplished that which Columbus sailed west to discover 400 years ago; a short cut to the Orient. And the Orient today is a vastly bigger prospect than it was when the shallops of Columbus cut loose from the shores of Spain. With the commerce of the world diverted through the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico there will be a new Mediterranean in which the civilization which is alive with the cotton gin, the textile weaving machine, the telephone, the telegraph-wireless now—and the wonders which have followed the introduction of steam, will unite to cover the waters of that part of the world with a business before which all that is past will seem insignificant. The wonderful country which lies on the western shores of South America, that country which Pizarro found reeking with gold and wealth, will waken and join its splendid advantages in the stream of traffic. The West Indies have been seized by modern hands and those islands, at types for the Hesperides will help swell this mammoth volume. Through the narrow channel at the Sault Ste. Marie passes a golden stream of wealth surpassing all other central tides the world knows. Or has ever known. Ere the first quarter of this century has passed that amazing volume of wealth will seem a tiny stream compared with that which will whiten the waters of the Mexican Gulf and Caribbean Sea, and which will center along the flat shores of the isthmus of Panama. Michigan's great senator, Zachariah Chandler, fought long and vigorously for the ship canal through which pass the ships of commerce as they go up and down through the Straits, just above Detroit. When that fight was being made, there was one set of locks at the Sault. When a larger was planned men stood agast at the chimera. Now a still bigger one is there, and across the way the Canadians have a huge one in operation. And as through the long summer days the great ships of commerce pass up and down, and wealth is generated in fabulous quantities, there is shown a mere fragment of what will transpire when the Big Ditch is in operation. In that which the Panama canal invites in progress, thrift, development and growth the south will hold the first, the lion's share. Southern cities will grow marvelously—New Orleans is now next to New York as an export point. Trunk lines will double their tracks. And then double them again. For a mere beginning is now made. The south is now entering on an era of development and growth which holds great marvels to be shown within the ensuing few years. This is a part of why less politics and more information of our great country would seem fitting and wise.

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